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The Aztec Civilization: Way of Life

The Aztec were an American Indian people who ruled a mighty empire in Mexico during the 1400's and early 1500's. The Aztec had one of the most advanced civilizations in the Americas. They built cities as large and complex as any in Europe at that time. They also practiced a remarkable religion that affected every part of their lives. The legacy of the Aztec Civilization is seen even today in the culture of modern Mexico.

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Find It!

Use the World Book search tool to find the answers to the questions below. Since this activity is about the Aztec civilization, it is recommended you start by searching the key words "Aztec."

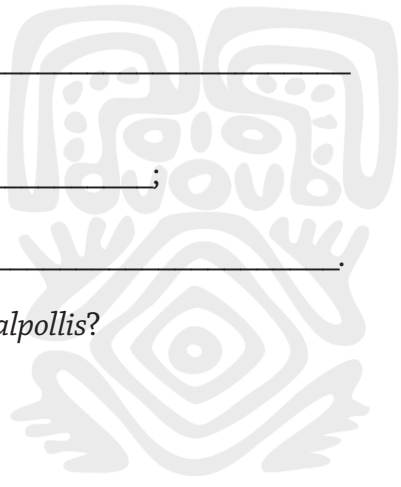
For some questions, fill in the correct term in the blank space to complete the sentence.

For other questions, write a short paragraph answering the question.

Hint: For the following questions, see the Introduction and the section "The Aztec Empire" in the article "Aztec."

1. The name "Aztec" is used to describe what people?
2. The people of the Aztec civilization referred to themselves by the names _____; _____ and _____ in their native language (3 terms).
3. The largest Aztec city was the capital, called _____. This city was built on an island in Lake _____.
4. Where was the Aztec Empire centered?

***Users of the Advanced database can find extension activities at the end of this webquest.**



5. The Aztec emperor was called the _____ (2 words), which means “Great Speaker.”
6. The four main social classes in Aztec society were: _____; _____; _____ and _____.
7. Describe how the Aztec managed their lands through groups called *calpollis*?

Matching!

The Aztec worshiped many gods and goddesses, each of whom ruled one or more human activities or aspects of nature. Match the Aztec god or goddess from column A with the aspect of nature or activity they were associated with in column B.

Hint: For the following questions, see the section “Way of Life” in the article “Aztec.”

Column A

- _____ 8. Huitzilopochtli
- _____ 9. Tonatiuh
- _____ 10. Centeotl
- _____ 11. Quetzalcoatl
- _____ 12. Tlaloc
- _____ 13. Mictlantecuhtli
- _____ 14. Ehecatl
- _____ 15. Xipe Totec
- _____ 16. Xiuhtecuhtli
- _____ 17. Xochiquetzal
- _____ 18. Tezcatlipoca

Column B

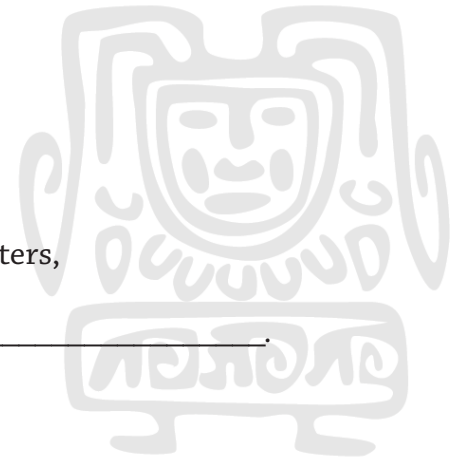
- A. Goddess of fertility and beauty
- B. Associated with civilization and learning
- C. A corn god
- D. Associated with springtime
- E. A fire god
- F. The sun god
- G. An all-powerful divinity
- H. Ruler of the dead
- I. God of war
- J. God of the wind
- K. A rain and fertility god



Find It!

For the following questions, fill in the correct term in the blank space to complete the sentence. For other questions, write a few sentences or a short paragraph answering the question.

19. What was the purpose of many Aztec religious ceremonies?



20. Why did the Aztec perform animal and even human sacrifices?
21. Most Aztec religious ceremonies took place in walled ceremonial centers, the main structures within these were called _____.
22. Many Aztec ceremonial centers had a playing court called _____ for a game called _____ that resembled a mixture of soccer and basketball.
23. The Aztec had two different calendars. Describe how they were different.
24. How were the houses of Aztec commoners designed and how were they different from the homes of wealthy Aztec families?
25. Briefly describe the most famous surviving Aztec sculpture. Who's face appears in this?
26. What was the purpose of warfare in the Aztec civilization?
27. The chief weapon of Aztec warriors was a wooden club edged with sharp pieces of volcanic glass, called obsidian. This weapon was called a _____.

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See It!

28. In the section "Language" within the World Book article "Aztec," you will find the picture titled "Aztec Writing." Study the picture. What similarities and differences do you see between the Aztec writing and written language today?

Word Search!

Many of our words for popular foods and other items come from Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. In the puzzle below, find the Aztec words hidden within the puzzle by reading the definitions below. In the Word Search Puzzle below, words may be spelled backwards, forward, or diagonally.

Hint: For the following questions, see the sections “Food” and “Warfare” as well as the section “The Aztec Heritage” in article “Aztec.”

Clues:

1. The Aztec used the juice of maguey plants to make this alcoholic beverage.
2. The principle food of the Aztec was this thin flat corn bread.
3. The Aztec raised this bird for food.
4. Only wealthy Aztec could afford to drink a beverage made with this popular ingredient made from cacao beans.
5. The Aztec gave us the name for this popular food used in ketchup, salads, and pizza sauce.
6. This Aztec food made of a flat cornbread stuffed with meat remains popular today.
7. The Spanish name for the food described in clue #2.
8. We use an Aztec word to describe this green round or pear-shaped fruit.
9. This is the Aztec word for small mud islands made by farmers in shallow lakes to grow crops.
10. The Aztec used this spear-throwing device to increase the range and force of their spears.

T C M S A Y I A I A R
O N H O K L H L V E K
R D S I T D L O X M F
T C U C N A C T A C O
I D O P C A M F K E L
L X S X D R M O H O T
L F A O R Y L P T Z A
A L Y E K R U T A J L
T U D R V T W O P S T
C H O C O L A T E M A
K Q V G J I O K P S B



Extension Activity 1: Relating to the Past

The Aztec way of life left a lasting mark on the culture of Mexico and some parts of the United States. What aspects of Aztec culture have you experienced? Describe at least two similarities between the Aztec culture and yours today.

Next, describe two aspects of your current culture that you hope will still exist in the world 500 years in the future. Explain your choices.

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Extension Activity 2: Compare and Contrast Ancient Pyramids

Within the World Book Aztec article, you will find a picture describing the pyramid of the sun at the ancient city of Teotihuacán, near present-day Mexico City. Other civilizations also built pyramids, the most famous being Ancient Egypt. How is the pyramid at Teotihuacán different from the pyramids of Ancient Egypt? Consider both how they were built and used. Use the World Book search tool to find the answers to this question. Since this activity is about Pyramids, it is recommended you start by searching the key words “Pyramid.”



Read more about the Aztec in World Book’s eBook collection:

The Aztec. Chicago: World Book, 2013. Early Peoples. *World eBook*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.

< <http://worldbookonline.com/wb/ebooks/mall/instit/catalog/urn:ISBN:978-0-7166-2335-9/detail.do> >.

The Aztec. Chicago: World Book, 2014. Native North Americans. *World eBook*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.

< <http://worldbookonline.com/wb/ebooks/mall/instit/catalog/urn:ISBN:978-0-7166-3076-0/detail.do> >.

Voyages of Exploration. Chicago: World Book, 2014. A Look At. *World eBook*. Web. 23 Nov. 2015.

< <http://worldbookonline.com/wb/ebooks/mall/instit/catalog/urn:ISBN:978-0-7166-3327-3/detail.do> >.

Teacher Page

Answers:

1. The name *Aztec* is also commonly applied to the people who founded the city of Tenochtitlan. *Aztec* also refers to this larger group of Indians who made up the empire.
2. The people of the Aztec civilization referred to themselves by the names Colhua-Mexica, Mexica, and Tenochca
3. The largest Aztec city was the capital, called **Tenochtitlan**. This city was built on an island in Lake **Texcoco**)
4. The center of Aztec civilization was the Valley of Mexico, a huge, oval basin about 7,500 feet (2,300 meters) above sea level.
5. The Aztec emperor was called the **Huey tlatoani** (2 words), which means “Great Speaker.”
6. The four main social classes in Aztec society were: **Nobles; Commoners; Serfs; and Slaves**
7. The members of a calpolli owned an area of land in common, and each family was allowed to farm a plot large enough for its needs. In addition to their calpolli land, most nobles had their own private land or received government land for use during their term in public office. Commoners made up the majority of the population, and many made a living by farming their calpolli plots. Serfs worked the land held by nobles and remained on the land when a new noble acquired it.

Matching!

8. I
9. F
10. C
11. B
12. K
13. H
14. J
15. D
16. E
17. A
18. G

19. The Aztec held many religious ceremonies. The most important observed planting, harvesting, and other events in the agricultural year. The purpose of many ceremonies was to motivate people to work together to ensure good crops by winning the favor of the gods.
20. Human and animal sacrifice played a vital role in the ceremonies. The Aztec regarded the human body and all living things as gifts from the gods. They believed that a divine power resided in three parts of the body—the head, the heart, and the liver. The Aztec thought that the gods required a ritual payment in the form of human hearts and blood to remain strong. Human sacrifices were elaborate, dramatic ceremonies designed to magically transform the human victims into living representatives of the gods before they were sacrificed.
21. Most Aztec religious ceremonies took place in walled ceremonial centers, the main structures within these were called **teocallis**.
22. Many Aztec ceremonial centers had a playing court called **tlatchli** for a game called **ullamaliztli** that resembled a mixture of soccer and basketball.
23. The Aztec had a 260-day religious calendar. Priests used the calendar to determine lucky days for such activities as sowing crops, building houses, and going to war. The Aztec also had a 365-day solar calendar. It consisted of 18 months of 20 days each plus 5 extra days.
24. Most houses for Aztec commoners were simple and designed for usefulness rather than beauty. In the highlands, the houses were made of adobe. In the lowlands, they had thatched roofs, and the walls were made of branches or reeds plastered with clay. In addition to the main dwelling, most families had several other buildings, including a storehouse and a small sweat house, where the family took steam baths. Wealthy Aztec families had large adobe or stone houses finely decorated and built around a patio.
25. The most famous surviving Aztec sculpture is the large, circular Sun Stone, which represents the Aztec universe. The stone measures about 12 feet (3.7 meters) in diameter. In its center is the face of the sun god Tonatiuh.
26. Warfare was considered a religious duty by the Aztec. They fought not only to enlarge their empire but also to take prisoners to sacrifice to the gods. The highest goal for a young man was to be a successful warrior. Men who took many captives in battle were rewarded with land, high social rank, and important government offices.
27. The chief weapon of Aztec warriors was a wooden club edged with sharp pieces of volcanic glass, called obsidian. This weapon was called a **macuahuitl**.
28. Aztec writing consisted of small pictures called *pictographs*. The Aztec used a form of writing called *pictographic writing*, which consisted mostly of images, pictures, and scenes. Some pictures symbolized ideas. Others stood for the sounds of syllables. Student should contrast this with our writing, which uses an alphabet to represent specific sounds without pictures.

Word Search!

Clues:

1. The Aztec used the juice of maguey plants to make this alcoholic beverage. **Octli**
2. The principle food of the Aztec was this thin flat corn bread. **Tlaxcalli**
3. The Aztec raised this bird for food. **Turkey**
4. Only wealthy Aztec could afford to drink a beverage made with this popular ingredient made from cacao beans. **Chocolate**
5. The Aztec gave us the name for this popular food used in ketchup, salads, and pizza sauce. **Tomato**
6. This Aztec food made of a flat cornbread stuffed with meat remains popular today. **Taco**
7. The Spanish name for the food described in clue #2. **Tortilla**
8. We use an Aztec word to describe this green round or pear-shaped fruit. **Avocado**
9. This is the Aztec word for small mud islands made by farmers in shallow lakes to grow crops. **Chinampas**
10. The Aztec used this spear-throwing device to increase the range and force of their spears. **Atlatl**

T	C	M	S	A	Y	I	A	I	A	R
O	N	H	O	K	L	H	L	V	E	K
R	D	S	I	T	D	L	O	X	M	F
T	C	U	C	N	A	C	T	A	C	O
I	D	O	P	C	A	M	F	K	E	L
L	X	S	X	D	R	M	O	H	O	T
L	F	A	O	R	Y	L	P	T	Z	A
A	L	Y	E	K	R	U	T	A	J	L
T	U	D	R	V	T	W	O	P	S	T
C	H	O	C	O	L	A	T	E	M	A
K	Q	V	G	J	I	O	K	P	S	B